

(Sumana) Dāna Sutta

The Discourse on Giving (with a happy mind)

[How to give with wholesome intentions]

(Aṅguttara Nikāya 6.37/3:336 f)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2006

Introduction

The Dhammapāda Commentary on Dh 112,¹ in the story cycle of the novice Sukha (DhA 10.11), relates how, in a past life, the labourer Bhatta, bhatika, in return for three years' work, obtains the privilege of enjoying the luxuries of the seth [treasurer] Gandha. However, when he is ready to eat, a Pratyeka Buddha appears, and Bhatta, bhatika gives him all his food. When Gandha discovers this, he gives Bhatta, bhatika half of all his possessions, and they become firm friends. The king, in turn, makes Bhatta, bhatika a seth. After his death, he is reborn in the deva world, whence he is reborn in Sāvatti as the boy Sukha.

On Bhatta, bhatika's merit in offering his meal to the Pratyeka Buddha, the Dhammapada Commentary explains how it is endowed with the four fulfillments (*catasso sampadā*), thus:

Catasso hi sampadā nāma: vatthu, sampadā paccaya, sampadā cetanā, sampadā guṇātireka, - sampadā ti.

Tattha nirodha, samāpatti, raho arahā vā anāgāmī vā dakkhiṇeyyo vatthu, sampadā nāma.

Paccayānaṃ dhammena samena uppatti paccaya, sampadā nāma.

Dānato pubbe dāna, kāle pacchā bhāge ti tīsu kālesu cetanāya somanassa, saḥagata, ñāṇa, - sampayutta, bhāvo cetanā, sampadā nāma.

Dakkhiṇeyyassa samāpattito vuṭṭhita, bhāvo guṇātireka, sampadā nāmā ti.

These are the four fulfillments: the fulfillment of the ground, the fulfillment of requisite [support], the fulfillment of intention, the fulfillment of bonus virtue.

(1) Here, the fulfillment of the ground refers to the arhats who have attained the solitude of the attainment of cessation, or the non-returners, or those worthy of gifts.

(2) The fulfillment of the requisite refers to the impartial arising of the requisites by righteous means.

(3) The fulfillment of the intention refers to the intention resulting from wisdom associated with mental joy during the three periods of giving, that is, before, during and after the giving.

(4) The fulfillment of bonus virtue refers to the acquisition of the state of a worthy recipient of offerings, after he has arisen from the formless attainments. (DhA 3:93)

In the (Sumana) Dāna Sutta, we can see at least the first three fulfillments in action, thus:

The fulfillment of the ground:	the Sangha headed by the arhats Sāriputta and Moggallāna;
The fulfillment of the requisite:	the offering is properly gotten; and
The fulfillment of the intention:	Nanda, mātā is happy-minded before, during and after her meal offering.

The fulfillment of bonus virtue would also be present if the offerings are made just after the arhats have arisen from meditating in the formless attainments.

The key teaching of the (Sumana) Dāna Sutta is that when one's offering to the noble Sangha or to a noble disciple—or any kind of wholesome giving—is made with a happy mind (*somanassa*), that is, while preparing the meal (or, before the offering), while giving and serving, and after it is all over, the

¹ *Yo ca vassa, satam jīve | kusīto hīna, vīriyo | Ekāhaṃ jīvitam seyyo | viriyaṃ ārabhato dalhaṃ =* Though one should live for a hundred years, | lazy and lacking effort, | better is a day's life | of one who makes firm effort (Dh 112).

benefits are supreme. This teaching is alluded to in the closing of **the Dakkhiṇa Vibhaṅga Sutta** (M 142) and its closing verse:

And how, Ānanda, is the gift purified on account of both the giver and the recipients?
Here, Ānanda, the giver is morally virtuous, good by nature, and the recipients, too, are morally virtuous, good by nature. Thus, Ānanda, is the gift purified on account of both the giver and the recipients.” (M 142.13/3:256) = SD 22.1

When one passion-free gives to one passion-free,
With a truly faithful heart, a gift rightly obtained,
Firm in faith that its karmic fruit is abundant—
That material gift is a truly bountiful gift, I say.² (M 142.14/3:257) = SD 22.1

*Dadato puññaṃ pavaḍḍhati
saṃyamato verañ na cīyati
kusalo ca jahāti pāpakam
rāga,dosa,moha-k,khayā sanibbuto ti*

Merit grows for the giver,
enmity grows not for the restrained,
the skillful abandons evil:
with the destruction of lust, hate and delusion,
he is cooled. (U 85)

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The Discourse on Giving (With a Happy Mind) (A 6.37/3:336 f)

1a At one time the Blessed One was staying in Anātha,piṇḍika’s Park in Jeta’s Grove near Sāvathī.

The six-limbed gift

Now at that time, the laywoman Veḷukaṇḍakī Nanda,mātā [mother of Nanda], established [introduced] the gift endowed with six limbs³ for the Sangha headed by Sāriputta and Moggallāna.

1b Now the Blessed One saw, by means of the divine eye [clairvoyance],⁴ purified and surpassing the human, the lay woman Veḷukaṇḍakī Nanda,mātā [mother of Nanda], established [introduced] the gift endowed with six limbs for the Sangha headed by Sāriputta and Moggallāna. Seeing this, the Blessed One addressed the monks, thus:

“Bhikshus, this laywoman Veḷukaṇḍakī Nanda,mātā [mother of Nanda] has established [introduced] the gift endowed with six limbs for the Sangha headed by Sāriputta and Moggallāna. And what, bhikshus, is the gift endowed with six limbs?

2a Here, bhikshus, the giver has three limbs, the recipients have three limbs.

What are the limbs of the giver?

Here, bhikshus,

² Comy: This last verse refers to non-returners, or to one arhat giving to another. Although the arhat believes in karmic fruition, since he is without desire and lust for existence, his giving is not productive of any fruit, but is merely a functional deed (*kiriya*) that has not trace (MA 5:77). Comy is being a bit technical here; for, this may also include laity who are even momentarily free from desire (say during a good meditation retreat) who give offerings to monastics who are also practitioners. See §13 & n above.

³ “The gift endowed with six limbs,” *cha-l-aṅga,samannāgataṃ dakkhiṇaṃ*.

⁴ *dibba,cakkhu*, clairvoyance, not to be confused with the Dharma-eye (*dhamma,cakkhu*) (see n in §102).

- (1) the giver gives with a happy mind;
- (2) while giving her mind is joyful with faith;
- (3) having given, her mind is joyful.⁵

These are the limbs of the giver.

2b What are the limbs of the recipients?

Here, bhikshus,

- (1) the recipients have removed lust, or are practising to remove lust; or
- (2) they have removed hate, or are practising to remove hate; or
- (3) they have removed delusion, or are practising to remove delusion.

These are the limbs of the recipients.

Thus, bhikshus, the gift endowed with six limbs.

The immeasurability of the merit of giving

3a Bhikshus, it is not easy to grasp the measure of merit of such a gift endowed with six limbs, thus, ‘To this extent is the yield of merit, the yield of wholesomeness, the bringing of happiness, the heavenly, fruiting in happiness, leading to heaven, conducive to what is longed for, wished for, lovely, beneficial and happy.’⁶

3b Bhikshus, just as it is not easy to the measure of water in the great ocean, [337] thus, ‘There are so many bucketfuls, so many hundred bucketfuls, so many thousand bucketfuls, so many hundreds of thousand bucketfuls’—

for, that great mass of water is regarded as incalculable, immeasurable;

even so, bhikshus, it is not easy to grasp the measure of merit of such a gift endowed with six limbs, thus,

‘To this extent is the yield of merit, the yield of wholesomeness, the bringing of happiness, the heavenly, fruiting in happiness, leading to heaven, conducive to what is longed for, wished for, lovely, beneficial and happy.’

Indeed, bhikshus, the great mass of merit is incalculable, immeasurable.”

3c Even before the giving, the mind is happy; while giving, the mind is bright with faith; Having given, the mind is joyful: this is the fulfillment of the offering.
Having removed lust, hate and delusion, free from the cankers:
The self-restrained brahmacharis [celibates] are the fulfillment of the offering’s field.

Cleansing⁷ oneself, one gives with one’s own hands;
And the offering bears great fruit in the hereafter, too, for oneself.
The faithful wise, having given thus, with a free mind,
The wise will arise in the affliction-free happy world.⁸

— evaṃ —

⁵ *Idha bhikkhave pubb’eva dānā sumano hoti, dadam cittaṃ pasādeti, datvā attamaṇo hoti.*

⁶ *Ettako puññābhisando kusalābhisando sukhassāhāro sovaggiko sukha, vipāko sagga, samvattaniko iṭṭhāya kantāya manāpāya hitāya sukhāya samvattatī ti.*

⁷ “Cleansing,” *ācamayitvāna*, absol of *ācameti* (Skt *ācāmayati*, *ācamayati*, caus of *ācamati*, “he rinses (by sipping water, esp ceremonial purification; or washing, ablution, after evacuation)). A religious and ritual term is given a deeper spiritual dimension by the Buddha here.

⁸ This last line at It 16, 82.

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